Sergeant Tandale

When We Met

What were you then and what are you now!



In the Marathi film 'Today is my day' (आज माझा दिवस), the Chief Minister of Maharashtra utilizes government resources to provide a blind singer with a home from the Artists quota in one night. However, his ego is bruised when he realizes that while attending an event, wealthy and influential elites are standing and greeting him as Chief Minister in anticipation of their arrival. When he sees someone sitting far away watching, he becomes angry and wonders who this disrespectful

person could be. Upon closer inspection, he discovers that the individual is an elderly blind singer.



The Chief Minister receives an application from the blind singer with folded hands explaining that all efforts to obtain a quota house through normal channels have failed. This interaction leads to a change of heart for the Chief Minister; if those benefiting from government schemes are deprived of basic necessities despite his position as CM, what good is it? He uses his power not only to advance political agendas but also to show compassion towards others. 'Today is my day' was well-received by audiences. A similar scenario occurred during one of my experiences where I observed non-compliance with customary respect practices among Airmen.

In 1993 at AF Stn Tambaram on posting duty, I attended Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations at Aarti hall with family members after being invited as senior-most officer present. The Airmen

greeted us respectfully by standing up except for one individual who remained seated throughout our arrival.

Later on during preparations for Aarti ceremony, I was provided a chair next to this person's seat whereupon they apologized saying "Sorry sir" because I am unable to stand up due to physical limitations - something which had previously gone unnoticed by me causing irritation at their perceived disrespectfulness initially. Before leaving though this same individual approached me again asking "Can you help me sir?"?' I looked at his face casually said, 'If possible can do.'

A few days later, a gentleman strolled through the gate. My daughter caught sight of him as he unlocked our quarter's entrance and stumbled in response. When she inquired in Marathi, "Is Sir present?" she informed me that someone had come to see me who looked like clock hands pointing at 6:15. Intrigued by her description, I hastened to greet my visitor only to find him struggling to settle into his seat. His upper body leaned heavily forward while bearing all his weight on a supporting cane; however, when the clock struck 6:15 precisely, his posture shifted entirely...! My daughter's characterization proved quite accurate indeed.

"I am Sergeant Tandale," he introduced himself. "You had mentioned helping me on the day of Ganesh Puja, and so I have come with great hope. Unfortunately, my current state is quite

humble due to a mysterious issue that has caused my spine to bend. Despite all efforts, no diagnosis has been made thus far. I follow any suggestion given in hopes of finding relief - from medications to exercises prescribed by Air Force doctors - but to no avail. The thought of suicide crosses my mind daily, though caring for my young children at home prevents me from acting on it. My wife provides encouragement during these trying times, reminding me that they shall pass and not to lose heart.

However, every medical board hearing fills me with dread as I fear losing my job due to this disability. Will someone like myself be allowed access into the outside world? It feels as if each day is spent only consuming medication provided by the Air Force without knowing why or when there will be an end in sight.

I was at a loss for words. I did not anticipate that he would take my refusal to assist him so gravely. Prior to the arrival of our tea, we engaged in casual conversation. Despite my admission of incapacity to aid him, he appeared disheartened and departed with a reproachful remark: "You have let me down greatly, sir. I had come here with high hopes and was met with ridicule from others."

Initially, I dismissed any thoughts of providing assistance as futile. However, the idea persisted within me: "Perhaps it is better to offer some form of help rather than regret not doing so later." With spontaneity, I offered an address where his request may be

fulfilled - albeit one located in Pune - but this only served to deepen his despair as he expressed concern over the difficulty associated with railway travel and lack of support from relatives.

As he made his exit using a stick for support, Avinash - my brother-in-law whom I had accompanied on a previous visit to Pune - suggested seeking guidance from Phatak Guruji's successors who possess great power and are renowned for their ability to provide solutions during times of distress or misfortune.

Although we were disappointed upon learning that Phatak Guruji had passed away since our last encounter, we discovered that his throne has been assumed by one of his daughters who continues her father's legacy by offering mantras capable of remedying various troubles through divine intervention; all thanks attributed solely to Guru's grace which guides us through unwavering faith in them resulting in favorable outcomes for those who seek their counsel.

His physical ailment, in fact, had no correlation with any external or mystical factors. I cannot explain why I suggested that Guruji resides in the State Bank Colony of Sahakarnagar area, but it is said that he has achieved spiritual enlightenment through Yogic Sadhana and mantra recitation. Perhaps he may be able to assist you. Although Sgt Tandale regarded my impromptu advice as genuine, I doubted whether he would actually follow through...

The journey to reach the gate took an extended duration… It was at this point when I mentioned 'Guruji possesses immense power; although it has been quite some time since we last met him. He goes by the name Phatak guruji - try paying him a visit'. However, I believe that Guruji is no longer present and instead his daughter provides remedies."Somehow I said, "will give you an address. See if that will work. But you will have to go to Pune". People go to her for any problem or hassle. She passes by the mantra to chant. Bhasmam to apply. She has cured many by mantra. She is the master. She guides on the strength of our firm faith in Almighty. People get cured.

He expressed his disappointment and stated, 'I cannot envision it as a possibility. Given the current circumstances, I am unable to undertake lengthy railway journeys. Moreover, there will be no assistance from our relatives in Pune.'

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'Who is there?' I exclaimed loudly. During the morning hours in my spacious office, I was engaged in discussing current tasks with my staff when suddenly my attention was drawn towards the door curtain which appeared to be moving forcefully. Without awaiting permission to enter, Sergeant Tandale arrived dressed in uniform and discarded his stick upon entering. Overjoyed he announced, 'Sir! Behold this miraculous occurrence! It feels like a rebirth has occurred!'

My eyes were incredulous as Sergeant Tandale strode towards me unaided. He extended his hand for a handshake, but I was too overcome with emotion to do anything but embrace him tightly. Tears streamed down his cheeks and I hugged him again, heedless of the onlookers present. Sensing the gravity of the moment, those around us dispersed quietly. Sir, I was so eager to share this news with you that I rushed straight here without observing any formalities.

He proceeded to recount the events that had occurred. "Sir, I had some annual leave and instead of staying at home, I decided to travel to Pune," he explained. His relatives were kind enough to assist him in his journey; one even offered to drive him using their auto rickshaw directly to the address provided. Fortunately, the address was accurate and they arrived without difficulty. Upon arriving at the gate, Tai (Mrs Phatak) instructed him to climb up to the first floor. He expressed hesitation due to experiencing intense pain in his spine with each step he took; however, Tai encouraged him by saying "take it slowly." Though it was a difficult task for him, he refused to give up on reaching his destination after traveling all the way from Tambaram just for this purpose. Despite feeling apprehensive about descending stairs later on and potentially worsening his knee condition further, he persevered until finally sitting before Dattatreya's statue upon completion of his ascent. Didi, the daughter of Phatak Guruji,

made me feel at ease and comprehended my situation. She encouraged me to chant Mantras alongside her and later provided Bhasmam for application on the affected areas and forehead. Didi assured me that my pain would begin to subside from that moment onwards, a statement which proved true as I descended each step towards the ground floor - with every step, my pain lessened! She also recommended visiting Lord Dattatreya's shrine. After spending a few more days under their care, my excruciating ailment was cured through these divine remedies. While not everyone may believe in such phenomena, it worked wonders for me! To avoid any suspicion regarding my speedy recovery, I will attribute it to the medication and physiotherapy administered by medical officers while using a walking stick as support.

The memory of Sgt Tandale, who exuded elation, vitality, and physical poise, persisted for a considerable duration.

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Greetings, Sir. This is Tandale speaking. Kindly ensure that you visit our office located on East Street in the camp area. I will be eagerly awaiting your arrival. It was a heartfelt request made over the phone. As promised, I arrived promptly on October 16th, 2011 to find Sgt Tandale dressed impeccably in executive class attire, complete with a full shirt and pants, tie and shining shoes while holding a wreath in hand to welcome me.

During our conversation, he passionately shared how he had started his new business venture and how his daughters were now actively involved in it as well. He humbly requested for my guidance saying "Sir, please guide us. You are an inspirational personality!" Although surprised by this request from young graduates who were already well-versed with new methods and challenges of marketing and sales; something within me prompted me to speak as if I was aware that someday I would have to share my knowledge of innovative business tricks while dealing with commercial ventures!

The clapping went on for quite some time after this engaging exchange with these enthusiastic young professionals who exuded freshness of youth along with their happy-go-lucky mood. We even took snaps together at their office which added to the jovial ambiance of the day!...

Once a frustrated and physically disabled Sergeant Tandale, now a prosperous entrepreneur known as Tandale Sir. The words "what were you then... what are you now" echoed in the air. The image of the poised and accomplished Executive Tandale Sir lingered in memory long after. This concludes the tale.



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A Night on the Pavement



A night on the pavement

Fifty years ago, amidst the relentless torrent of rain and a power outage past 11 pm, my friend, his father and I were left with no choice but to wander aimlessly in search of food and shelter for the night. Eventually succumbing to exhaustion as we collapsed on the hard pavement with only our hands serving as pillows.

As we lay there, contemplating the vast expanse of stars and moon above us in this vulnerable state - devoid of comfort or companionship; our tired bodies reeking of sweat from toiling for tomorrow's sustenance - my friend's father engaged me in conversation.

"Shashi," he said thoughtfully, "this ordeal should never befall you again. But remember this night nonetheless. Look upon tonight's world through eyes that are not your own - view it from those who do not share your privilege. Let these thoughts inspire you to achieve greatness."

The night eventually passed, and we stumbled upon suitable lodgings during our early morning journey onwards. The memory faded into oblivion as life progressed into one filled with comfortable mattresses and luxurious amenities.

But every now and then, catching sight of someone else lying on a cold pavement serves as a poignant reminder of that fateful night... For even though money was abundant amongst us at that time, any initial grumbling about life's hardships was quelled by our circumstances.

And so I learned: if dealt with wisely and resolutely, even dire situations can be overcome; a message which has stayed with me throughout my life...



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